

Vote SEP in Sri Lankan provincial elections

Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka calls on voters in Kegalle district to vote for the party's slate of candidates in the provincial council elections on September 8.

The burning issues facing working people—attacks on living conditions, free education, welfare and basic democratic rights—can be solved only through the struggle for an international socialist perspective. We call on voters to reject all the political parties that promise solutions on a parochial provincial or national basis as fraudsters who are trying to hoodwink the masses once again.

As the SEP insisted from the outset, whatever the outcome of Saturday's polls, President Mahinda Rajapakse's government will continue to impose the severe austerity measures dictated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Rajapakse, who is seeking another IMF loan of \$500 million, has agreed to slash the budget deficit to 6.2 percent of gross domestic product by the end of the year. This can only mean deeper inroads into the living conditions of the working class in the coming months.

The ruling United People's Freedom Alliance government is carrying out an election campaign based on thuggery and improper use of state resources. According to the Election Secretariat, 337 complaints about violence and violations of electoral laws have been recorded so far—most against government politicians. The government aims to win by hook or by crook, then falsely claim that it has a popular mandate to carry out the IMF agenda.

Rajapakse is abusing his position as president by actively campaigning in the election. He used an anniversary meeting of his Sri Lanka Freedom Party to

speak in Kegalle on September 2, promising “to bring this country to the centre of Asia so that people will be delivered huge concessions and benefits.” The president expressed the belief that through the election “people will issue a true message to the international community that the country has taken the correct path.”

Like every country in the region, Sri Lanka is being drawn into the maelstrom of the US-China rivalry that is raising the danger of a catastrophic war. Washington and its allies have been exploiting the Sri Lankan government's abuses of democratic rights to press it to distance itself from Beijing. Rajapakse's “message” is a futile plea to the US to ease the pressure.

Three years after the defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Rajapakse's promises of peace and prosperity have proven completely false. The president boasts that his government has maintained high growth rates, but the worsening global economic situation is impacting heavily on the island's economy. The government has to borrow more money from the IMF to stem the widening balance of payments deficit produced by declining export income and remittances from overseas workers. Foreign investment has fallen. Not a single industrial plant has been established over the past three years.

The result has been devastating for working people. The unemployment rate is escalating. Wages have been frozen but the value of the rupee is falling and the inflation rate continues to rise. The government has slashed price subsidies on essential items, including food, fuel and transport. At the same time, it is slashing spending on education, health and welfare.

Large areas of rural Sri Lanka are facing an unprecedented disaster. The drought has caused the loss

of rice crops on 150,000 acres in 12 districts. The government's promise of relief to farmers has been exposed as a fraud. Thousands of farmers have joined protests in the North Central Province to demand immediate payments.

The government's response to strikes and protests is repression. The police-state apparatus built up in three decades of communal war against the Tamil minority is now being turned on working people as a whole. Over the past year, the police have fired on striking Katunayake Free Trade Zone workers, killing two, and protesting fishermen, killing one.

The establishment opposition parties offer no alternative for working people. The United National Party (UNP) and Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) backed the government's war against the LTTE and defended its war crimes and abuses of democratic rights. Neither party has any fundamental disagreement with the IMF's austerity program and would implement it just as ruthlessly as the present ruling coalition. The UNP initiated pro-market restructuring in the late 1970s and the JVP was part of a Sri Lankan Freedom Party coalition in 2004-05 that imposed the same agenda.

The Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC) and Upcountry People's Front (UPF), based among Tamil-speaking plantation workers, are contesting in Sabaragamuwa Province in an electoral bloc with Democratic People's Front (DPF). The CWC and UPF, which are partners in the Rajapakse government, and the DPF, which is aligned with the UNP, promote the fraud that electing "Tamil representatives" will help plantation workers. These parties do not represent the working class, but the Tamil elites who seek to bolster their own privileges while dividing Tamil workers against Sinhala workers.

The pseudo-radical organisations—the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) and United Socialist Party (USP)—play the most pernicious political role. The NSSP and USP both joined the UNP's so-called "Platform of Freedom," helping to legitimise this right-wing party's fraudulent claim to be a defender of democratic rights. These parties function as part of the

Colombo political establishment and are deeply hostile to the SEP's fight for the independent political mobilisation of the working class.

The SEP is the only party with a principled record of opposing the civil war and defending the social and democratic rights of working people as a whole. We fight to unite Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim workers with their class brothers and sisters throughout South Asia and internationally in a joint struggle against the capitalist system. Never has this task been more pressing. Workers in every country confront a relentless assault on their living standards and democratic rights, as well as the danger of deepening rivalries between the major powers and war.

The SEP seeks to rally the working class, and behind them the rural masses, to fight for a workers' and peasants' government to implement socialist policies. The major banks, industries and services must be placed under the democratic control of the working class to meet the pressing social needs of the majority of working people, not the profits of the wealthy few. Society must be reorganised on a world scale to satisfy the aspirations of humanity as a whole. The fight for a socialist republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam is completely bound up with the struggle for a union of socialist republics of South Asia and for socialism internationally.

The internationalist program of the SEP was expressed concretely in the recent tour of Sri Lanka by Jerry White, the presidential candidate for our sister party, the SEP in the United States. American workers and Sri Lankan workers can defend their class interests only through a unified struggle, as part of the international working class, to abolish the bankrupt capitalist order. We urge workers, young people and farmers in the Kegalle district to vote for our party, study our program and join the SEP to build it as the mass revolutionary party.



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